

This is a tape of a tape made by Mr. Ralph Siddoway on 10 August 1978. Mr. Siddoway recorded himself. The topic is Billy Preece, an old sheriff of Uintah County. My name is Mike Brown of the Golden Age Center. Today is October 24, 1978.

Ralph: Billy Preece was my friend before I was born. On October 9, 1905 my dad was on Diamond Mountain up in the Lanson Draw, forty-five miles from Vernal. Billy Preece had been a friend to my dad and mother for a long time. He came down home on the morning of the 9th of October and Mother was expecting to have a child and Dad was up in Lanson Draw rounding up his horses to bring them down for fall. Billy Preece asked Mother if she wanted him to go get my dad. She said, "Yes, I wish you would." That was about 9:00 in the morning. Billy Preece rode up horseback to Lanson Draw and got my dad, and the two of them rode back. They were back home just a little before midnight and I was born right shortly after they returned. Billy Preece was a good horseman. It takes a good horseman to ride ninety miles in one day. This Billy Preece did.

My earliest recollection of Billy Preece was he was a stocky-built man with a bald head, keen sense of humor. He liked company, he liked to talk, he liked people to converse with, he was an outgoing person. You'd never know from visiting with him that he could stalk a man and shoot him down. This Billy had done, but he was very reluctant to talk about it. If you didn't hear it from some other source, you wouldn't know about it.

He was what you might call a boy's man. He knew all about the outdoors, he knew how to live outdoors without anything except a saddle horse. He knew how to carry food or get along without it for a week at a time and just what he could carry in his saddlebags. My earliest recollection of him telling me about being a sheriff is really kind of spotted. He'd just talk a little bit and then he didn't want to talk any more about it.

He did have a Colt double-action revolver that he carried with him when he went to the mountain. We've made many trips with Billy Preece to the mountain, and it was his usual practice to strap his gun belt containing his .38 Colt around the front of his saddle. I never did see [him] strap his Colt to his side. I know he has many times, but of course, my recollection of him is perhaps starting in 1912, 1915, sometime in there because at that time, most the bad men were already in prison. Of course, Billy Preece had helped put [them] in prison and had taken some, delivered to the State Pen. He always kept his revolver with him whenever he went to the mountain. He wasn't a man to shoot at things. He just had it there.

One weapon that rather intrigued me was a sawed-off Winchester shotgun, and it was down to our place for a long time. I think Billy never did take it home, he left it down to our place, and I asked him about it one day. Dad had told me it belonged to Billy Preece, and I asked him what he did with that. He said, "Well, sir, if you really want to put the fear of God into a bad man, you just pick up that sawed-off shotgun. I've never seen a man that wasn't afraid of a sawed-off shotgun. You can shoot them faster and more accurately than you can a pistol, and these people who profess to be real courageous and brutal, they just wilt like a wildflower when you have one of those sawed-off shotguns with you."

He also had a .30-30 Winchester carbine. He didn't carry this carbine with him very much like he did his Colt revolver, but he had it, in fact, he had two. One of them was almost a new .30-30 carbine, the other one looked almost new, but he said it was worn out. He got into a shooting match with Flat-nosed Pete where they were shooting across Green River. He said he

shot that gun so many times and so rapidly that he wore the rifle out and it never did shoot straight after that, but he kept it. I don't know what happened to it, but he had that in his own home and I suppose that perhaps one of his boys got that. His .38 revolver he gave to my brother, Ray, and the sawed-off shotgun he just left down home, I don't know what happened to it. It was around home and when I went to school for four years and when I come back, why it was gone, and I still don't know what happened to it. I didn't ever see anybody shoot it, but it was quite a relic, it was in good condition, it was sawed-off with a real short barrel.

His horsemanship. Billy Preece was an excellent judge of horses. If you wanted someone to go out and select a horse for you, I couldn't recommend anybody better than Billy Preece. He could select a good saddle horse, he could select a good cow horse, he could select a good team, and he always had a nice team and a nice saddle horse and they were always in good condition. He always kept them in top-notch condition. I never did see him with a poor horse. They were always fat, not to be overly fat, but in real good condition to where they could do a day's work at a moment's notice.

He was game warden for a long time here in Vernal. In fact, that's what he was in my earliest recollection. When we'd go to the mountain, we'd shoot sage hens, you shoot a lot of sage hens and Billy Preece, the game warden, with us. I never did see Billy Preece shoot a sage hen, but he liked to go out and show us where they were. He knew where they were and he knew how to shoot, and he could always take you to where the sage hens were.

My dad tells about Billy Preece when he was a game warden during the homesteading years along in the early '20s. Things were pretty tough for homesteaders down on Diamond Mountain. Billy Preece just happened to come upon a man who had shot a deer. It was out of season, it was in the forepart of July. He went over to the fellow who had shot the deer and he said, "Well, you shot it, you better dress it and take it with you." So they did, and Billy said, "I'll have to arrest you." The man said, "Well, I guess you will." And when they got over to the dry-farmer's cabin, Billy said there was not a thing in that cabin to eat. He said he felt real badly about having to arrest the man, but he took him down to Vernal and told the judge what had happened. The judge fined the man \$20 for killing the deer out of season, then Billy Preece paid the fine for him.

Billy didn't go to church very often, he never did preach a sermon in church, but he could sure preach a sermon around a campfire. He lived a sermon all his life. He was a man who believed in fair play and lived fair play, but to come out and preach, he wasn't that kind of a man. Bishop Hyrum B. Calder asked him one day, "Billy, I have two jobs. I need somebody to go ward teaching and I need somebody to haul some manure on the lawn down to the chapel. Which one of those jobs would you like to do, Billy?" Billy says, "Bishop, I'll pitch the shit."

Billy was never afraid to do hard work and he was never afraid to be in a tight situation. He was a person who didn't put himself off extremely to make money or to make a big show of any kind. But he always seemed to have sufficient for his needs, he always had something to do, he always had a position, and he was always reliable.

When he was sheriff, even in his later years, people always respected him. Nobody said anything bad about Billy Preece. While he had to do some things in his life as sheriff that he didn't like to do, he was still one of the most likeable persons that I've ever been around. He knew how to treat men, he knew how to treat animals, and he knew how to be respected and not be domineering. He was never a person who thrust himself on anybody. He was always one who was jovial, knew good, clean stories, would tell them when the occasion was right, but he kept quiet when it wasn't right.

For my part, when I was growing up as a lad, I just remember Billy Preece as an ideal outdoorsman. I loved him very much and I know that he loved me. He didn't express it, I never did hear him say that in words, but it was in his actions you could tell deep down in Billy Preece that he had a deep, abiding love for human beings. This is the kind of a man that I remember Billy Preece being.

end.